

HELL ON EARTH

Ten years after *The Da Vinci Code*, veteran filmmaker Ron Howard and beloved actor Tom Hanks reunite for a new Dan Brown adaptation, *Inferno*. Words Gill Pringle



The *Da Vinci Code* was a satisfying movie translation that became a solid box office hit. But not so much the 2009 sequel, *Angels & Demons*.

Seven years on, the dream team return with Dan Brown's *Inferno*, which sees Tom Hanks reprising his role of symbolologist Robert Langdon, this time recruiting the help of Felicity Jones's Dr. Brooks. The pair race across Europe to prevent a deadly virus from wiping out the human race.

Brown fans will note that *The Lost Symbol*, the third in this quartet of stories, has been skipped over for the big screen.

"It was a really good book but it deals more in the past and we didn't know how to make it fresh and exciting as a standalone movie. It wasn't enough to just count on the fact these books have a following," explains Ron Howard when *STACK* meets with him in his Beverly Hills office.

But in *Inferno*, the director found what he describes as "an exciting, very contemporary thriller story, immediate and of-the-moment."

"Here Brown has brilliantly still found a way to use the past – Dante's original conception of Hell versus the possibility of a hell on earth today, of our own making."

Hanks was also drawn to recreate Langdon in a way in which audiences will learn more about him than ever before. "Tom is able to give Langdon so many more interesting nuances,"



notes Howard. "It's much more personal this time round, and Langdon is actually part of this mystery, so Tom really liked that as a performance opportunity for himself. And I love directing complex performances as well, so I felt this was a great chance for one of our best actors, ever, to do something dynamic and really entertaining, and still follow all the things we really love about the Robert Langdon clue-path adventures."

Bringing the Dan Brown mysteries to the screen has always resulted in a gourmet European experience for cast and crew, and *Inferno* is no different.

"Part of my attraction to making them is the life experience," admits Howard. "They've really opened the world up to me. It wasn't like I didn't travel before, but when you wind up

living in places and working in cities like Istanbul and Florence, Venice or Budapest, it's very stimulating."

Howard, 62, has a great fondness for Australian actors, directing Chris Hemsworth in *Rush* and *In the Heart of the Sea*; Russell Crowe in *A Beautiful Mind* and *Cinderella Man*; Nicole Kidman in *Far and Away*; and Cate Blanchett in *The Missing*.

"I'd love to work with all four of them again," he says. "They're four great artists with Australia in common, but they also have talent and great work ethics in common."

During a prolific career which began as a child star, playing Richie Cunningham in TV's *Happy Days* for seven years, Howard accelerated into directing and producing film, animation, TV and documentaries. *Cocoon*, *Splash*, *Backdraft* and *Apollo 13* are among his many revered box office hits, and more recently he took on music documentary duties to peek behind the curtain at The Beatles, Jay-Z and Katy Perry.

Although having worked with a galaxy of Hollywood stars, he has yet to direct his own daughter, actress Bryce Dallas Howard.

"I've directed all kinds of temperaments, all kinds of actors, at every level, every age, every personality type; and I've never had any of them, no matter how difficult they might be, roll their eyes at me when I give them direction... and I just have this fear that it could just be in the DNA of our relationship as a father and a daughter. But the reality is that I have tried to work with Bryce and she's never available, so someday ... someday."

➔ *Inferno* is in cinemas on Oct 13.



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